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The Effects of Daily Art Activities on Attention in Elementary Students

An Action Research Report
By Marjan Oghabi
The Effects of Daily Art Activities on Attention in Elementary Students

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

The goal of this action research project was to investigate the effects of morning art activities on student focus. The intervention took place over five weeks at a public elementary school. Nineteen students participated in a lower elementary Montessori classroom of six to nine year olds. The qualitative and quantitative data collected were student surveys, behavior tally sheets, student and teacher assessments, field observations and conversations. The evidence showed a relationship between daily art activities and student concentration. The students increased their time on task while writing reflections about their artwork throughout the five-week study. Future research could examine the role of art on students’ social emotional development and how art exploration develops cooperation.

*Keywords:* art activities, concentration, focus, journal reflections
An experience with art in a classroom is a happy occasion for children. In my teaching practice, I have noticed that children continually ask to draw, color, or make art every day. Students come in the morning eager to see if art is in the plan for the day. There is an excitement in the room when they find an art example placed up on the whiteboard. For teachers there is an emphasis placed on teaching academic subjects, which unfortunately results in little time for art for students. Children in the primary program at our school often require adult assistance to remain on task when engaged in academic activities. The overall focus of students is an area of concern in all of our classes. However, when engaged with art activities students are truly engaged and focused.

Art opportunities in an elementary classroom have been shown to be beneficial for children’s cognitive and social development. Frequent exposure to creativity and art in the classroom are necessary and important for children. Tyler and Likova (2012) explain, “visual art learning is reliant on a complex system of perceptual, higher cognitive, and motor functions, thus suggesting a shared neural substrate and strong potential for cross-cognitive transfer in learning and creativity” (p. 1). How can children be so engaged and on task with regards to art activities, but need support to stay on task in other areas? This action research project will address two main issues: making time for art and addressing lack of focus in other areas through the increase of art activities. Hopefully by making art time for students a part of an everyday morning routine, their level of attention (on-task behavior) in their work will increase during the school day.

My action research was carried out within my multi-age Montessori class located in a public triple track school (English, French, and Montessori). The elementary school
has a population of approximately 350 students. There are 19 children in my classroom comprised of 6 grade one students, 7 grade two students, and 6 grade three students. Eleven students are boys, and eight are girls. The children in my class are from diverse backgrounds and have different learning needs. I am the only classroom teacher.

Therefore this study examines the benefits of introducing art regularly into the morning routine of a primary multi-age Montessori class. By increasing the exposure of art time for students, during which the students are highly engaged, there could possibly be a movement towards greater focus on other work tasks throughout the day. Students began their day in an imaginative, productive, and artistic way followed by academic subjects. I investigated the effects of morning art activities, documenting attention to task and looking at the written reflections of students’ on their work, their creativity and their focus. Did the introduction art positively affect student focus?

Review of Literature

The research supported the claim that the arts have a valuable role on student learning. Specifically, art integration provides opportunities that build concentration, create student success, foster creativity, allow for positive change, and develop engagement (Cress & Holm, 2016). This literature review examines attention, creativity, art within creativity, the need for the arts, the impact of art on student learning, and ways to include art activities into the classroom.

Attention

Attention is essential for learning to occur. Students show evidence of their learning in relation to a task. Ostroff (2012) explained, “paying attention is a prerequisite for all learning, and regulating our bodies - keeping physical arousal calm and stress
levels even - propels attention” (p. 58). Similarly, Sylwester and Cho (1992) discussed “attention - the ability to focus the mind - is a prerequisite to learning and a basic element in classroom motivation and management” (para. 1). The implementation of self-directed learning, extended amounts of time, and art stations facilitate the building and sustaining of attention in students (Ostroff, 2012, p. 65). One of the interventions to improve student attention is through art and creativity.

**Creativity**

According to Beghetto and Kaufman (2014), creativity occurs every day. The research acknowledges that creativity is a way of communication (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Bigger 2015; Tyler & Likova, 2012). The Four C Model based on mini-c, Little-c, Pro-C, and Big-C, (feedback, practice, and time) represents the development and expression of creativity (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014, p. 55). This framework aids teachers in recognizing the steps that establish the flow and progression of creativity in the classroom. The important factors are feedback where ideas form (mini-C and Little-C), practice to allow for creative development (Little-C and Pro-C), and time to allow for art (Pro-C and Big-C) (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). All students have the ability to be creative and show their creative side each day in school (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). For example, Creative Endeavors is an approach that instills motivation and creativity for one hour, as students are free to explore various art media and fulfill their interests (Cress & Holm, 2016). Zimmerman (2010) recognized that creative self-expression is significant to art education.

**Art Within Creativity**

Art becomes an avenue for creativity (Zimmerman, 2010). Integrating art into the
curriculum involves students creatively connecting art to a subject area (Biscoe & Wilson, 2015). Bigger (2015) stated that there was a, “complimentary relationship between creativity and art education: art education is how a person develops understandings about the art world and creativity is how a person adds to the art world” (p. 106). The bond between art and creativity becomes significant when children have the opportunity to experience art activities in the classroom. Grierson argued that art has the means to expose greater knowledge of oneself and the world (2011). Art becomes the passageway for creative practices; therefore, art and creativity are interdependent.

**The Need for the Arts**

Linking creativity and art as a teaching strategy to encourage concentration among students becomes more important in an era where standardized testing and measurements of scores seem to outweigh the process, thinking and self-discovery of student learning (Robinson, 2012). Utilizing art in the classroom promotes the discovery process, the steps in thinking, and the passion for creativity, which are key areas to develop in education. Beghetto and Kaufman explained, “nurturing students’ creative potential is a valuable, yet often unrealized, educational goal” (2014, p. 53). Robinson has been an advocate of creativity, arts, and innovation and he argued “people often achieve their own best work at a personal level when they connect with a particular medium or set of materials or processes that excite them” (as cited in Azzam, 2009, p. 3). Robinson also noted the importance to “think visually” by drawing or moving (as cited in Azzam, 2009, p. 3). A classroom environment based on incorporating creativity every day allows for exploration, intrinsic motivation, and meaningful connections to learning in other subjects (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014).
The Impact of Art on Student Learning

The research highlights how art integration into classrooms can transform the learning experience of students. An action research project by Bigger (2015) explored art education and how creative skills produce concentration in a student teaching internship. Bigger (2015) proposed that art education should be aimed at observation, identification, and assessment of creative behavior. A study by Smithrim and Upitis (2005) on Learning Through the Arts exhibited a strong correlation between learning through the arts and mathematics. The study comprised of a sample of over 6000 students in grades one through six and took place over three years. The qualitative and quantitative findings demonstrated the cognitive connections between art education and other subject areas specifically to math skills (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). Similarly, student engagement and cognitive growth generally improved student learning (Fagan 2015; Miller 2011). In one action research project comprised of seventy-eight third graders, reading comprehension increased when paired with visual artwork as students recalled important parts of the story through their artwork (Mathieson, 2015). Third-grade students’ ability to identify the main idea of a text was stronger by creating artwork after reading (Mathieson, 2015). These studies illustrated the contribution of the arts to academic achievement, mathematical aptitude, literacy, memory, and attention in elementary classrooms. Art has the potential to engage all areas of development.

Ways to Include Art Activities into the Classroom

Art is a subject area that students readily enjoy. An activity of interest evokes concentration, positive feelings and engagement (Shernoff, 2013). Grimm (2012) asserted that the act of making art evokes new understandings. Creating art deepens
one’s comprehension of a subject area. A visual connection creates meaning and thus unity to a student’s experience of what they are learning about in the curriculum (Tyler & Likova, 2012). Teaching art develops thinking skills that transfer to other subjects (James, 2015; Loomis, Lewis & Blumenthal, 2007; Miller, 2011). Tyler and Likova (2012) clarified that there is a relationship between drawing and writing in the brain. For example, neuroimaging studies show how “drawing shares cortical substrate with writing, access to semantic system, memory, naming, imagery, constructional abilities, and the ability to estimate precise spatial relations” (Tyler & Likova, 2012, p. 3). Visual art learning can transfer learning to competencies in other disciplines (Catterall, 2002). Artistic experiences enhance student learning.

The literature demonstrates ways to incorporate arts into the classroom environment. These seven ideas are common across the literature: time for art practice, interest, art materials, journal writing, connecting art to other subject areas, collaborative learning, and positive teacher interactions. First, one hour a day can encourage art and creative practices (Cress & Holm, 2016). The importance of time connects with the Little-c notion of practice from the Four C Model (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Second, students should have the opportunity to follow their interests through exploration, discovery and hands-on learning (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Bigger, 2015; Collard & Looney, 2014; Cress & Holm, 2016; James, 2015; Miller, 2011; Zimmerman, 2010). Third, an abundance of materials should be provided ranging from art supplies, paper, and other resources (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Cress & Holm, 2016; James, 2015). Fourth, writing journals should be utilized to further the learning and explanation of the art process, aiding in student reflection (Cress & Holm, 2016; Fagan, 2015; Russell &
Hutzel, 2007; Wallin & Durr, 2002). Fifth, art has the capacity for interdisciplinary practice that furthers the understanding of curricular content (Cress & Holm, 2016; Fagan, 2015; James, 2015; Miller, 2011; Russell & Hutzel, 2007). Sixth, collaborative learning allows students to share their knowledge (Cress & Holm, 2016; Fagan, 2015; Loomis et al., 2007; Miller, 2011). Seventh, teacher support and feedback aid in the active community of learners where students feel safe to take risks (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Cress & Holm, 2016).

The literature supports the benefits of the arts on overall student learning and the usefulness of art as a teaching strategy. I hypothesized that daily art education would have an influence on student concentration throughout the day. This study will add to the body of knowledge on the impact of art and creativity on student development. It will benefit the needed research on the positive outcomes of attention through the implementation of the arts in elementary education. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of art activities on student focus in a multiage classroom of grades one to three.

**Methodology**

The process of implementing art in our morning routine began with a discussion between my students and myself. I explained my project to my students. I stressed that this was not a way to grade them but rather to continue learning as an educator. The students cheered that they would receive a full hour of art each day! A letter was sent home to the student’s parents to inform and explain the study to them, and no families wished to opt-out.

The time span consisted of a five-week observational and data collection period
that commenced on Tuesday, September 13, 2016. During this first week baseline data was collected. Due to the September 23rd school closure for Professional Development, week one began on a Tuesday to make up for the lost day, and therefore ran from Tuesday the 20th to Tuesday the 27th. After that, weeks ran from Wednesday to Tuesday. Monday, October 10th was a Thanksgiving holiday, so there was no school. The one-hour of art did not occur during Week four on October 14 due to a musical performance. On Thursdays, the journal writing occurred at a different time than usual, as the students had PE until 11:35am. On Fridays, the journal writing did not happen as there were many interruptions to the day such as Family Reading, Physical Education, Spelling Test, and Friday Journal. All in all, each period of data collection was mostly on the same day throughout the implementation study to ensure a natural flow in the classroom. Also, all data sources were utilized and gathered for the five-week study.

One hour of art occurred in the morning (right after morning circle) each day during the five-week implementation. Students had access to an art shelf filled with different sized paper and textures (construction and white paper), oil and chalk pastels, crayons, felts, watercolor paint, and tempera paint. As Montessori education values love of learning and independence, students choose their materials and created pieces of art from the available resources. Students could use this time to follow their interests fulfilling their creative endeavors, working independently or with other students. The follow-up activity was a self-reflection through journaling where students wrote about their artwork. The journal entries gave details into what children made in their art time. Depending on the child’s level of writing abilities the details were at least one or multiple sentences in length.
The primary methods of data collection consisted of behavior tally scores while students were journaling, student self-assessment on their ability to focus, self-assessment and teacher assessment from their journal entries and their artwork, field observations of focus, and conversations with students. There were 19 students in my multi-age class.

The baseline data collection, using the behavior tally sheet, measured the minutes on-task while journaling (see Appendix A). I observed using the tally sheet to record data, three times each week from 10:05 to 10:20. I made a tally mark for each student (19 students) who was on-task at the intervals of 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, and 15 minutes during the 15-minute period of time. I wanted to observe if over time more students were on-task when writing about their art experience. If students were more focused for the full 15-minute duration over the research period, then there would be a connection between art and attention. On-task behavior was noted for writing and completing the journal picture using pencil crayons. Students had the option to start their writing or picture first. My goal was to gather evidence of student’s ability to concentrate on journaling to see if art time in the morning allowed for increased attention with their work. After the baseline data was completed, I changed the journaling time to occur after the recess break so students could have sufficient time to clean up, have a snack, and complete the daily planner before the recess bell. Since art occurred in the morning, it made more sense for students to get ready for snack prior to their outside time so when they returned they were ready to write in their journals. During the second and fourth week, the behavior tally sheet was used three times at the same time, 11:05-11:20 one hour later than the initial baseline data collection.
The implementation of the daily art period began on September 20, 2016. Students had access to a variety of materials: paper, construction paper, oil pastels, chalk pastels, colored markers, crayons, pencil crayons, watercolor paint, tempera paint, and brushes. The hour of art was between 9:15 to 10:15 and the art implementation time remained consistent throughout the study. I made a list of suggested art activities for art time (landscape paintings, math patterns, drawing an animal, season illustrations, drawing a setting from a story) and used this chart only in the first week to give students some examples of topics for the art time.

The observations in the field journal occurred two days a week for 20 minutes (see Appendix B). Students were observed for incidences of engagement, persistence, and focus in their art time from 9:30 to 9:50. I was looking to see if students were engaged with their work, if they were persistent to keep working until finished and if they were focused on their task. I observed half of the class in one day and the other half on the second day. After the initial two days of field journal data, I expanded the data collection to the journal time. The journal observation occurred from 11:20 to 11:40. My focus was to gather evidence for engagement, persistence, and focus during writing as well. In the first week, the field journal observations occurred on different days for art activities and journal writing. However, in subsequent weeks, I used the field journal to observe on the same day in both areas and at the same times. My reasoning for observing at the same time was to ensure validity and to see if growth occurred. I also wanted to see if the engagement, persistence, and focus during art carried over to when the students were writing as I was trying to answer if there was a link between art activities and attention in academic subjects, such as writing.
In the daily observation (see Appendix C) I highlighted what choices the students made, the students focus on their art task, and took notes within the hour. I began the daily observation by sitting back and primarily watching the children in the classroom environment. Next, I engaged in dialogue with the children about their art and took notes as I walked around the classroom. I also assisted students when needed during this time.

The fourth piece of data I collected was the student self-assessment (Appendix D) on how they felt about their work time. The self-assessment was a survey where students circled how they felt, answered yes or no questions, and rated themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 on their level of focus. Students understood what focus meant so not much clarification was needed. We always completed the self-assessment together on the carpet, and this took place on Thursday afternoons. I emphasized that completing the form was a self-reflection process and a form of honesty. The students who could read helped out the non-readers and I helped out where needed. Over time, the students became accustomed to helping one another and would offer support without guidance.

The artwork rubric (Appendix F) was filled out once a week at the end of the week. We sat in a group circle on the carpet and gathered all our artwork. Students looked through their work and picked the artwork they thought was their best work. I explained the art rubric each week. The students checked off whether they felt happy, neutral, or sad in each of the four sections: concentration, composition, creativity, and craftsmanship. I explained the sections prior to filling out the assessment form and made sure each individual understood each criterion. Students became more familiar with the form with each week. On the bottom of the rubric, students were asked to write one or two words describing their artwork. I completed the teacher assessment afterward using
a green marker because it emphasized the green (happy) zone from the Zones of Regulation (yellow is excited, red is angry, blue is sad). I took photos of the artwork throughout the week, and after week one, to aid in further documentation, I took a group photo of the artwork that was used for the art rubric.

For the journal writing, sentence starters were written on chart paper and offered to support students (see Appendix H). Every day the chart paper was up and ready to be used for journal time. For a handful of students in the classroom, a teacher or I scribed what they said before completing the journal writing. The journal rubric was completed at the end of the week (Appendix G). Similarly, we sat on the carpet and reviewed the dates from the week. I asked them to read their journal entries and the students choose the one they felt best about, to use for the self-assessment. I offered choice and respected the students’ individuality for this exercise by keeping the entries open rather than all of them choosing the same date. At the bottom of the rubric, I asked the students to write the date of their journal entry they were using to self-assess. Students made check marks indicating if they felt happy, neutral, or sad for each of the five sections: concentration, composition, creativity, craftsmanship, and connection. I used the same four C’s to allow for repetition and familiarity with both the artwork and journal rubrics. In addition I added the rubric criterion on connection to show how art can connect to other subject areas. I also completed the teacher assessment part using a green marker.

Twice during the study I engaged in formal conversations where I noted what the students said as stated in Appendix E. The data collection was used to offer insight into the art time, collect feedback on the student’s thoughts about their level of focus, and their feelings. The discussion was group based, and I documented all answers.
Analysis of Data

The first data collection analyzed was the behavior tally sheet showing whether the students stayed on task while journaling for 15 minutes (see Appendix A). The tally sheet was used three times a week at the same time, during the first week for the baseline data, and then in weeks two and four while the art intervention was being implemented.

Figure 1. Percentage of Students on Task over Fifteen Minutes

Figure 1 displays the mean results of students on task during the 15-minute period while journaling. The mean percentage was recorded from the three days in the baseline week, week two and week four. In week one, the students lost interest while writing. There was a growth in the 5-minute area, the 10-minute area, and the 15-minute area in weeks two and four. By the end of the research most of the students were focused on their journaling for the full 15 minutes. From the baseline to week four, there was a 37% increase in the 2-minute mark, a 43% increase in the 5-minute mark, a 41% increase in
the 10-minute mark, and a 44% increase in the 15-minute mark. The greatest
development occurred in the 15-minute area, which shows that writing about art had an
influence on student focus over the research period.

On-task behavior was noted when working in their journals, writing and
illustrating. Students were still able to socialize with table members as long as there was
sufficient writing taking place in the journal. There was an increase in the number of
minutes that students were on task while journaling about art throughout the five-week
study, being more consistently on task for the full fifteen minutes in week four. I
therefore concluded that there is a relationship between engagement in art activities and
the increase of attention.

There are a few conditions that possibly affected the results. The study began
during the third week of school, and the students were in their new class for two weeks.
Some days there were students who were away or pulled out of the class for learning
support which explains why at times there were fewer than the full 19 students assigned
to my class. For the baseline data, the student’s journal topic was on their summer
vacation. No art implementation occurred during this time. In weeks two and four the
students wrote about their morning artwork. Throughout the study five students were
given writing assistance, either from the Education Assistant or with the use of white-
boards as a visual aid.

The next piece of data collected was the student self-assessment (see Appendix D)
on their feelings and level of focus over the four weeks of art implementation.
**Figure 2. Student Self-Assessment on Their Work Time**

Figure 2 illustrates the results of students’ responses on the self-assessment, indicating whether they felt happy or unhappy, distracted or focused, and calm or excited. The graph shows that students felt happy at the beginning and their level of happiness increased. One child wrote, for example, “I am happy when I do art”. Another student described how making a book was why he felt happy. Students connected art to feelings of happiness whether it was something they made in art or from having art in the day.

There was a decline in the number of students who were calm and an increase in the number of students who were excited. A few commented that they were distracted because they were spending time with a friend and then their work was not finished. Many of the students reported they were excited to continue their art learning in the morning. The increase of art time demonstrated a greater degree of contentedness among the students.
Figure 3 indicates that the students reported they felt very focused on a scale of 1 to 10, ten being very focused. Overall more students chose very focused over any other category, even though during the four-week implementation the level of very focus came down by one, possibly because there were two students absent that fourth week. The fairly focused rating grew by two students totaling four in weeks three and four, which might explain that the students were becoming more self-aware of their focus while working. It was important for the study to have the students involved in rating their focus levels so that they could develop an understanding of their being able to self-monitor their work habits. The figure shows that there was a relationship between art and attention when the students self-assessed their concentration. Students were reflective when filling out the survey. Near the end of the study students indicated that they felt more focused, with more noting they felt fairly focused than somewhat focused.
In addition to the student responses, conversations took place in week 2 and week 4. The discussions showed that the student replies were all positive when asked about having art each day. Students associated creating things and having the creative time with enjoyment. For example, “it is fun having art in the morning and connect it to math and science,” one child explained. “It is good to make stuff,” a student shared while another student said he or she was “fine” with having art each day. Students felt their concentration was about the same in week two and four. A few students said they felt happier. Other students said their level of focus was good. The student responses indicate a positive relationship between art and attention.

The daily observations from the art time in the morning revealed that the students made prompt choices and were always enthusiastic. They were focused on their activity even though there was lots of movement in the classroom as students shared materials and resources. Students were independent, yet they also collaborated with one another. A supportive atmosphere appeared in the room where students naturally helped one another to get paint materials, share the stapler as they made things, and looked at book examples together. The behaviors were consistent with the students each day and in each week of the implementation. The emphasis on art created an active and purposeful dynamic in the classroom environment.
Figure 4 depicts the levels of focus that was observed during journal writing twice a week. The field journal (see Appendix B) was used for 20 minutes at 11:20-11:40 twice a week. Observation of each child happened once a week. The results from the graph showed that week one had the lowest number of students focused while in week two and three the number of students doubled to 12. Week one showed 36% of students who were focused, week two showed 67%, week three showed 63%, and week four showed 53%.

The drop in week four could have been due to a few factors. Students may have known the research study was near the end, which caused some excitement amongst them. Even though the field journal observations were done at a consistent time (before lunch) and usually occurred on the same days, there were days when some students were tired. As I was often the sole adult in the room, I myself could have introduced a variable while balancing the observation process with meeting the needs of my students when
responding to their need for help and support with their journal work. During these times I may not have collected data on focus in my students. This form of data collection was more anecdotal in form with less detail. I was therefore often collecting two forms of data in one journal block, qualitative and quantitative, which complicated the process of data collection. In retrospect, if I were to repeat this study, I would not use this tool (or use it during a different work block). In addition, I would collect more data using the behavior tally sheet, as it measured the focus of each child more precisely with each interval of time.

There was, however, a 17% increase in the number of students focused from week one to week four, so there was growth from the beginning of the study until the end. The observation included students who were persistent with their work during the 20-minute interval and students who showed engagement while journaling. Although my original data collection tool had sections for persistence and engagement as well as focus, when I went to do the actual observations I stuck with recording students who were focused as those that were, were usually also engaged and being persistent. Therefore when it came to collecting the data there was too much overlap between the three aspects of concentrated work to record the data separately.

It is important to consider that once students finished their journal writing they moved on to other learning tasks in which they were noted for doing so, and still observed for focusing. Some students were also out of the room receiving support during this time.

The rubrics showed that the students were self-reflective when assessing their artwork and journal writing. Students filled out the rubrics honestly. The self-assessment
was an important piece of the data collection because I wanted the students to be a part of the research process and give feedback. In week one, 16 students reported they felt happy with their concentration while journaling. Compared to week four, 14 students checked happy, 2 chose neutral, and 1 was sad with their concentration. The reasoning behind the number drop could be that some students were too social and that their work was unfinished. Students were able to acknowledge their own concentration levels as it shows they developed self-awareness about their learning and work habits.

My primary research question was would daily art in the morning increase student’s concentration levels throughout the day? Based on the data collected, there was an increase in concentration from the baseline data to the end of the study where more students were on task in the fifteen-minute mark while writing about their art.

**Conclusion and Action Plan**

This action research project displayed the importance of using art regularly in classroom learning environments to help increase student concentration. The positive outcomes from the project showed that art is a powerful tool for communication. Art was used in conjunction with student writing, reflections, and self-assessment. Doing projects in a creative framework established a cooperative and collaborative classroom environment. The daily art block developed student sharing and discussion with others. During the study connections between the students were seen daily.

If repeated, some variables could affect the results of the action research project. These are the time of commencement of the study and the length of the study. The study was conducted at the start of the school year, a time where expectations and routines were developing. I wonder how the results would have been different if the art implementation
was at a different time in the school year? Could the results have been more significant if the students were more settled, used to the classroom environment, and had already developed relationships with the other students? Or conversely, might they be chattier and thus less focused, as they knew each other and the routines better? Conducting the study for a longer period would result in having more data in the relationship between art and attention. To adequately measure concentration extra time would be needed to see a deeper significance as the focus is a behavioral outcome.

Art practices were valuable. For example, I learned that art time helped children concentrate. The morning art time impacted the student’s ability to focus on their work, especially with journaling. Throughout the study, the children increased the number of minutes they were on task while writing about their artwork. The student self-assessment also showed that the students reported they felt “very focused” because of the daily art.

I observed gains in student social and emotional development. For instance, students indicated that they felt content due to art occurring each day. Students shared their positive feelings of creating things and having more opportunities for art (such as painting, making things, and drawing). The children consistently showed happiness, excitement, and engagement through the morning art. Through the study, the children became more engaged with each other as they complimented one another. They shared experiences of similar interests. For example, students would typically reveal to their table members when they mixed a new shade of color. The collaboration was a common theme in the room where children worked on things together. New connections developed as children followed their passions and worked together based on the same interest. Cooperation was evident when observing the children working on different art
tasks. Getting out the paint, using the tape, sharing books, and cleaning up were ways the students displayed unity in the class. A partnership formed between the multiage students.

There was also a renewed interest in daily writing. As students wrote about their art process each day, they were able to express their ideas in a manner that came easily to them since the art time had occurred in the morning. Journaling was an important avenue for student expression. Writing about the artwork was a natural process for students. The regular practice of creating art, explaining the steps and giving details developed student writing. The study showed a progress in student writing. The daily use of journaling was a way to build language skills.

Since art had many benefits to children, I will expand art offerings in my classroom. I plan to use art as an avenue to connect to other subject areas. Allowing my students to use creative forms through art activities to further expand their understanding of language, math, science, and social studies content will benefit student learning and focus. Reflecting on the learning from the school week, children will have the opportunity to further their knowledge using an art form and then write about the process. For example, students can choose one topic they have learned and use art to demonstrate their understanding. In math, students can illustrate their mathematical thinking using a picture. In science, drawing, painting or building an ecosystem could be an activity to demonstrate their understanding of abiotic and biotic factors. Students can create a character in the story they read during the week. Integrating art into subject areas will allow children to be creative and make art a regular part of the classroom.
I also plan to continue facilitating activities that allow diverse and individual forms of the creative process, by giving children more frequent opportunities to express themselves using a multitude of media. The art time had very few structures in place: the openness, time, and resources were the only structure. The creative process was an important avenue for children to have exposure to, as it allowed for student expression, peer connections, and social interactions in the multi-age level classroom. Following one’s interest was a key factor in the morning art. Similarly, Montessori education values student interest, love of learning, and independence. The art shelf will become a part of the classroom environment highlighting the significance of art as a subject. This research has enabled me to see the long-term benefits of increasing art in the classroom on student focus.

The possibilities for further research could include exploring how art builds collaborative group work in the elementary classroom. The relationship between art and elementary children’s feelings would be another topic for further exploration. Frequent exposure for students to create and use art forms could deepen student learning. I hope this research brings attention to the need for art integration into elementary classrooms.

This research project contributes to the understanding of the impact of the arts on student learning. Including art as a regular part of the classroom schedule proved to be meaningful for students. Creative avenues of expression and linking artwork to writing established integration between subject areas. The creative forms of art also impacted on the social relationships between the students in the class. Art had a significant effect on student emotion. I feel that art is a powerful tool for fostering student concentration.
References


Appendix A
Behavior Tally Sheet

Baseline/week 2/week 4
3 times a week for 15 minutes  Date: __________  Time: __________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes on Task</th>
<th>Focused Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>2 min</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Observations: Field Journal

Week 1/2/3/4
2 days a week for 20 minutes Date: __________  Time: __________

Incidences of Engagement:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Incidences of persistence:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Incidences of focus:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Check</th>
<th>Check</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C
Daily Observation Record Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Reflective Questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What did I observe today that can be useful to my Action research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What type of choices are students making in art?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are students more focused?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have I seen a change in concentration levels?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D
Student Self-Assessment

Week 1/2/3/4
Once a week

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

How do I feel about my work time today?

Circle one

1. Happy          or          Unhappy     Why?_______________________________
2. Focused       or          Distracted   Why?_______________________________
3. Calm            or          Excited     Why?_______________________________

4. I was my personal best.  Yes       No

5. I got my work done.        Yes       No

6. I am getting better at finishing my work.  Yes       No

7. My level of focus today was:

(Circle a number 1 = not focused 10 = very focused)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not focused</td>
<td>partly focused</td>
<td>somewhat focused</td>
<td>fairly focused</td>
<td>very focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E
Conversations

Week 2 and Week 4 (initial student responses)

“How do you feel with this creative art time each day?”
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
“How does the openness of art exploration affect your learning?”
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
“How is your concentration throughout the day?”
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
“What other thoughts can you share about how you like/dislike art each day?”
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
## Appendix F

Artifacts: Artwork Rubric

Once a week-Student and Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art Rubric</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concentration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used my time well. I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The art is balanced and it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>works together.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My art is unique and I used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>my own ideas.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Craftsmanship</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My art is neat and carefully</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made. Coloring, painting,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cutting, gluing and other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>parts of the process were</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>all neat.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G
Journal Rubric

Once a week-Student and Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal Rubric Criteria</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used my time well. I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>worked hard.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
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<tr>
<td>My writing is clear and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I gave details about my</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>artwork.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>I wrote about why I</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>chose to create my</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>artwork.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmanship</td>
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<tr>
<td>I explained the steps I</td>
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<tr>
<td>used to create my</td>
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<tr>
<td>artwork.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>My artwork connects to</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>other subjects.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H
Journal Prompts

Today I worked on
______________________________________________________________.

I made ____________________________ using____________________________.

My artwork is special because______________________________________.

The steps of my artwork are
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________.

My artwork connects to ___________________________ because
________________________________________________________________________.

One thing I learned making this artwork is__________________________.
Appendix I
Student Art Samples

Pattern butterflies by a grade 1 student
A rocket ship created by a grade 2 student
Sunset painting completed by a grade 3 student
Appendix J
Student Journal Samples

Grade one journal response

Grade two journal response

Grade three journal response